DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 168 442 HE 011 164

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TITLE Student Selection: A Review.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the National Recreation and Park Association Congress (Miami Beach, Florida, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Admission Criteria; *College Admission; College Programs; *Competitive Selection; Higher Education; Individual Characteristics; Leisure Time; *Recreation; *Student Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS *Selective Admission

ABSTRACT

A summary of factors involved in the college student selection process and implications for leisure service, recreation, and resource programs at colleges and universities are discussed. Criteria for student selection involve objective and subjective measurements of academic ability. Objective selection procedures include scholastic grades, rank in class, aptitude tests, and achievement tests. The three most common subjective measures are information about personal qualities, accomplishments, and biographical data. Arguments used for and against the implementation of selective criteria within a program of study are presented. The process of limiting the quantity and quality of students entering a leisure service program is beginning to become more accepted. It is concluded that if leisure service programs are going to pursue a selective admissions program, it must be based upon academic resources, the available market for graduates, and a realization that there are many other programs without limited enrollment who will be competing for available positions. (SW)

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STUDENT SELECTION: A REVIEW

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1978 National Recreation and Park Association

INTRODUCTION

In the academic atmosphere the prospective student is a common entity. As educators, many of us spend a good deal of our time during certain periods of the year counseling prospective students or reviewing new student files. Although the number of students in leisure service curricula is not increasing as dramatically as it was a few years ago, we are still faced with a number of students who pass through our programs for brief periods of time during their academic career.

Those students who remain in the program we hope to be of a high caliber, but often time we have little input in the selection of these students.

Initially a few definitions are in order:

1) Nonselective admissions - is the process of accepting all high school graduates, or the equivalent, or individuals over 18 years of age without a high school diploma. This is most common at the community college level, but it is also prevalent at the public four-year institution.

2) Selective Admissions - is that process undertaken by an institution or program(s) within an institution to discriminate among applicants for the purpose of predicting academic success. Some applications will be selected, some will be rejected.

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3) Selective admissions that in addition to the above, control or strongly influence entrance into the profession. This area has been traditionally characterized by disciplines such as law, medicine, pharmacy and so forth. This is an area which must receive our attention.

4) Preferrential Admission-are those processes that are designed to give preferrential treatment to minorities in the student selection process.

CRITERIA FOR STUDENT SELECTION

A significant amount of research has been conducted into the student selection process. Rather than cite specific studies in this section, reference will be made to areas of consequence in the selection process.

Selection procedures are divided into objective and subjective measurements of academic ability. Dealing first with objective selection procedures one finds that this area includes such things as scholastic grades, rank in class, aptitude tests and achievements tests.

Most faculties and research and measurement specialists agree that the previous academic record of a prospective student is the most relevant source of information for judging academic competence. Some research has pointed that at the undergraduate level grade point average is a more accurate predictor of academic performance than tests. Other research has suggested, however, that tests and grade point average must be considered together in order to gain a full appreciation of the student's abilities.

The value of the grade point average lies in its ability to reflect previous student ability. A large amount of research has shown that past behavior is a good predictor of future behavior. In this sense the

use of grade point average is a common indicator used in the selection process to determine future academic success.

Grade point average also reflects student motivation. Those programs where grade point average becomes a premium for admittance create a strong motivational impact on the student.

Grade inflation is a weakness in the use of grade point average as a predictor. During recent years there has been a noticeable increase in the propensity of students to receive A's and B's. This imbalance in the grading structure is also apparent when attempts are made to compare grades. There is little grade compatability between departments, institutions or instructors within institutions. The variance that exists among institutions and their grading policies and practices makes the use of grades as a sole determinant in the selection process a less than desireable practice.

Tests, which are normally administered prior to the time the student arrives at the institution, are the second type of objective measurement. While many public supported institutions do not require undergraduates to take such a test, selective institutions frequently require one or more such tests.

Tests used in the selection process typically place emphasis upon verbal comprehension and quantitative skills. Because these tests measure cognitive ability they provide useful predictors of academic performance in a variety of situations. The ability for broad application of the standardized tests is important due to the very nature of the American education system. In contrast to many countries, the educational system in this country is fragmented in its presentation and control. No central agency

provides direction for all of the nation's schools. The standardized test represents the only basis for measuring competencies of the different school systems.

Finally, tests are able to free students from subjective bias initiated from outside sources. Prospective students who may have been rated by former teachers and counselors lower than the tests indicate they should have been can have this bias rectified through standardized test results.

There have also been some severe criticisms of standardized tests. The most frequent criticisms have been in relation to the validity of the tests as they relate to minorities and in their ability to predict future success. Research conducted in this area has been somewhat contradictory, ut there appears to be evidence to support the minority claim of discrimination in the tests. The second point, their use as a predictor, has to some degree been decided by various court decisions. The courts have stated that use of tests are appropriate when they focus upon general abilities required for success in an educational program. When used as a selective criteria in a professional program the faculty must have good reason to believe that a particular competency is important (3:130).

Other items in the administration of tests which need to be considered, but are not discussed here are validity, feasability, secondary effects and fairness. Each of these must be considered when determining whether to implement tests into the selection process.

SUBJECTIVE SELECTION PROCEDURES

Subjective selection procedures, by there very nature, are less valid than objective types of selection procedures, and yet have to be

considered an integral part of the total selection process. These procedures are most predominantly used by selective institutions or programs.

The variety of subjective measures is endless. The three most common are information about personal qualities, accomplishments, and biographical data. The information can come from a variety of sources. It comes from standardized tests and from contacts between the student and the institution or curriculum. Additional information is gleaned from admissions forms, letters of recommendation and attachments.

Personal characteristics provide admissions information in other pertinent ways. Special education interests by a student may argue for or against admission. Background information may provide a strong argument for admission when other procedures tend to eliminate the prospective student.

Accepting the notion that the academic process is broader than primarily pure a cademic competence provides a rational for accepting personal accomplishments and developed competencies as a part of the selection process. These include academic honors, extracurricular activities, work history, honors achieved and other relevant information. As useful as this information is, few institutions or programs have yet developed a procedure and rational for insuring that the prospective student's achievements relate to the objectives of the institution.

Biographical data, the third most common subjective measure, includes the common demographic information, but also may include a variety of other information such as interests and experiences, and a wide variety of personal characteristics. Biographical data is primarily used for admin-

istrative purposes, even though in some cases demographic data may have an effect upon the selection process. Constitutionally suspect areas such as race and ethnic background must be considered with reference to recent court decisions.

A strength of biographical questionnaires ties in their flexibility and accuracy, but they are subject to faking. Demographic data, if used, raises ethical and legal questions. Biographical data has not been used, for the most part, mechanically to predict success or exclude students, but more so as an aid in forming overall judgements in selection.

The interview and personal recommendation fall into the classification of personal appraisals. Although in many programs the interview is considered to be a vital part of the selection process research has shown that the validity of the interview to predict future academic success is subject to doubt. The major criticism of this type of appraisal lies in its lack of consistency. Judges are sometimes biased, and appraisal is frequently not focused effectively upon the specific type of evaluation the judge is capable of making.

Subjective judgement has several inherent advantages and disadvantages. Its greatest strengths lie in the value of human judgment and in the ability to give special consideration to individuals with unique qualities or abilities. To make it effective the admissions officer or committee must be able to select the information which is most relevant to the decision. Proper selective judgement tends to provide some balance to objective judgement.

The major weaknesses in subjective judgement have to deal with

fairness and equity. Social bias is an important factor which appears when subjective judgement is used. There is a relative degree of unreliability of the forms which can lead to an impairment of the fairness of decision reached. Although these weaknesses can be overcome the expense and time required would be impractical.

THE SELECTION PROCESS

The selection process for leisure service, recreation and resource programs is as diverse as the curricula which is offered. In this paper it is impossible to discuss all of the ramifications of the different selection procedures, or even to discuss the variety of selection procedures.

The SPRE Curriculum Guide provides a basis for much of the presentation. Although the Curriculum Guide is not all encompassing, it does provide a fair representation of what is currently being done in the student selection process within academic institutions. In addition, a survey was conducted of several curricula to determine their selection procedures.

If one were to glance through the Curriculum Guide it would become apparent that grade point average, High School Diploma and standardized tests are the most common selection methods for the institutions that leisure service curricula are housed in. Further, admission to an institution is generally the only prerequisite for entering a leisure services curriculum.

Historically this has been the traditional path for entering a curriculum. It has been only with the advent of professional accredita-

tion that selective criteria has been implemented widely for specific programs. A recent Carnegie Commission Report on higher education estimated that sixty percent of the four year institutions in higher education had selective criteria, but that there were no known figures for the number of individual programs with selective admissions.

There are a number of arguments both for and against the implementation of selective criteria within a program. The argument against selective admissions is strong. A large number of the present curricula exist in public institutions. These institutions have been the primary source of education for the general public. Entrance to a public institution as an undergraduate has normally meant that the student is free to pursue any undergraduate curriculum within the institution. This assumption is often plainly stated in the institutions promotional literature and catalog. In addition, once a student arrives on campus for his or her first visit a number of departments are ready to market their program to the student. Each curriculum is somewhat desirous of maintaining a good student enrollment for budgetary purposes.

Private institutions, though not faced with the same argument as public institutions, must still be aware of the argument for admissions to the college as being the only prerequisite for a given curriculum. In a period of declining enrollment it is unlikely that an institution will implement selective admissions for a program that is not a primary source for entrance into the profession.

Another agreement often put forward is that selective admissions should be reserved for graduate programs. This has been a traditional

role of selective admissions. The purpose of undergraduate programs, it has been argued, is to provide the student with a broad, liberal arts program with a specialization in a selected area. This specialization is frequently of such a nature at the undergraduate level that it is actually a preparation for the more specialized study prevalent in the graduate program. Even our own accreditation standards recognize the need for a broad based undergraduate curriculum. "Since the undergraduate curriculum is designed to give the student a broad basic foundation and orientation in professional preparation for recreation, leisure services and resources, no specific specializations are fully delineated. . ."

rationaliaation that is of less concern to the non-educator, but of great concern to educators is that of budget. Most institutions are tied to the system of receiving a budgeted monies based on student-hours generated, number of majors, etc. The need for an adequate budget cannot be ignored. Without a budget the effectiveness of the department can be seriously impaired, both by the lack of resources and by the decline in morale of the faculty. Until such time as institutions develop an alternate method of allocating resources, curriculums will be tied to a system that does not benefit the student, the faculty or the curriculum.

As a result of the previously mentioned arguments a vast majority of curricula restrict their selection process to that of the institution. More subtle forms which might be used within the curriculum, but cannot be used to block a students admittance could include orientations, student information sheets, personal interviews, grading and the like.

The personal interview is one of the most common. It allows the

faculty member to make general assessments of students and to try to guide them in an appropriate program. As previously indicated, the personal interview does result in a certain amount of bias and when dealing with freshmen it is often difficult to assess future potential or what their particular vocational aspirations may be.

In those curricula where the selection process is determined by the institution, the greatest degree of flexibility occurs with transfer students, when they are from within the institution. Whereas transfers from other institutions and entering freshmen are often thrust upon us, those that come from within the institution are, to a degree, at the mercy of the curriculum to accept them. Generally the faculty or a faculty member responsible for review of most transfer students gleans and proposed students records and also conducts the interviews. Past academic performance, reasons for the change of major, and other data are all consideration that are made in relation to the acceptance of new students.

SELECTIVE ADMISSIONS

The process of limiting the quantity and quality of students entering a leisure service program is beginning to become more accepted. Several institutions have developed a formal student selection process. In most cases the selection process was developed as a result of placing a limit on the enrollment in the curriculum. The practice of limiting enrollment has been a subject of controversy in recent years. Several programs have encouraged it because of resources that were already stretched, and with the leveling off of student growth not yet in sight. There are others who have supported the concept, but due to institutional

limitations have not been able to implement it. A discussion of some of the components of the student selection process follows.

A review of the admissions procedures for curricula where limited enrollment is instituted shows an emphasis placed upon subjective selection procedures. Frequently the programs are closed to freshmen. This forces the freshmen into another program or into a general area of study. Obviously some students who would have initially selected the leisure services field are dissuaded, but all curricula interviewed indicated that there are more than a sufficient number of applicants to fill the available vacancies. A few curricula provide special counseling for Freshmen students to insure that they enroll in the appropriate course of study during their first year.

The only objective measurement made by the curricula interviewed was through the use of grade point average. In each case students were required to meet a minimum grade point average before any additional processing would commence. The minimum requirement ranged from 2.0 to 2.3 on a 4.0 point scale. One institution indicated that an average grade point average of 3.0 was required for admittance.

When student applications are reviewed most institutions grouped applicants by their grade point average. For instance those with a 2.0 to 2.4 were in one group, 2.5 through 2.9 were in another group, and so forth. This became the initial discriminator in the selection process and places a premium on the student who can perform academically.

The most common subjective measure was a statement of professional and/or personal goals. In one case it was titled a statement of intent to become a major. The selection committee uses the statements for a number

of purposes. They provide an indication of the student's ability to organize his/her thoughts for presentation. They provide the committee with an indication of the student's knowledge of the field and whether he or she has a realistic approach. It provides a basis for determining english and communication skills.

Interviews prove to be both a formal and informal part of the admissions process. The types of interviews varied from a panel of three to a single faculty member. When the panel was employed there was an attempt to insure that at least one faculty member sat through all the interviews. One institution indicated that they attempted to interview most of the students, but were not always successful. The interview for marginal selections was often the determining factor in the decision to accept or reject a student. The interview, therfore, appears to be a very important part of the student selection process.

In the case of transfer students from another institution it was often difficult to secure an interview in advance. In at least one instance a curriculum was required to provide the office of transfer admissions with a quota of students they would accept. It then became the transfer office's responsibility to make the admissions decision.

Previous experience was another common criteria for the selection process. One institution required that prospective students have had some type of experience in the field prior to application. Another only desired that the student have some type of paid or volunteer experience, but not necessarily directly related to the field.

A final area sometimes looked at was personal achievements. What

offices had the students held, had they received awards, scholarships, other recognition? What other significant recognition or accomplishments had they achieved? What organizations were they members of? The discussion of extra curricular involvement as a determination in the selection process has been common in many selective programs and institutions.

Although some respondents indicated that they were sure that the admission process discouraged some students from applying, those applying had made the initial commitment the facilities sought. One institution indicated that they had accepted only 45% of the applicants. In other cases, many of those who were unsuccessful the first time reapplied a second time.

When asked to identify advantages of limited enrollment and the selection process there were several answers. Chief among them was that the quality of the student had risen. There was a feeling that the better students were being accepted into the program. There was a distinction present among students who were admitted to the program. Respondents indicated that as faculty, those students who were in their classes were more motivated when compared to before the implementation of selective admissions.

Students academic and practical performance was improved. This was apparent, not only in the classroom, but also to the practitioners who are accepting these students in a field practica setting.

In addition to student advantages there were also identified advantages for faculty. Faculty morale was increased as a result of a lighter teaching load. Research involvement increased for faculty members. Opportunities for outside involvement in professional and service activities were increased. Faculty members felt that classes were better prepared and more

relevant to the field of study. The response of the faculty in these curricula has been positive.

Retention of students was improved. Although none of the surveyed programs had data readily available to compare there was a consensus that a result of selective admissions that the number of transfers and dropouts has decreased significantly. One program estimated that they had a retention rate near 95%.

Difficulties in establishment of the program were common. Once the Deans of the college in which the program was housed was convinced of the practicality of selective admission, then its implementation moved much quicker through the institutional change process. No questions were asked about the difficulties of implementation of the limited enrollment program into an already existing curriculum.

The question of how resources were effected varied. One institution indicated that as a result of limited enrollment that their resources have actually increased. This is due in part to the greater availability of faculty for research time and the improved teaching performance. Other institutions indicated that resources tended to remain consistent with other departments and they were not penalized for limited enrollment.

A topic not officially approached in the survey was the treatment of minorities, when discussed with those responding, however, there appeared to be no formal prefferential admission process. Most respondents indicated that informal procedures existed, such as waving grade point average accepting minorities above the admissions quota, and so forth. The recent Bakke decision and other similar court decision will force all selective

admissions processes to review their selection procedures. Also of concern is the affirmitive action guidelines provided in federal legislation. o date the courts have not dictated to colleges what admission processes they should follow, but have indicated that they must have 1) uniformity of application and 2) a fair administration of regulations. (5:41)

As indicated previously those programs with selective admissions are a distinct minority at the present time. Accreditation has not appeared to have a specific effect upon selective admissions. There are accreditation standards which require written admission guidelines, but they do not specify that they must be different from those of the institution.

MARKET AVAILABILITY

Selective admissions in professional programs are traditionally limited to curricula that serve as the nearly sole point of entrance into their profession. These are frequently characterized by state supported programs existing in private liberal arts institutions. They also tend to be characterized by the presence of a licensing or certifying board at the state level.

At the present time there are estimated to be in excess of 200 parks and recreation programs in 4-year institutions of higher learning. Less than 15% of these have selected criteria and limited enrollment. This certainly cannot be compared with many of the traditional professional programs which have restricted the number of available programs and enrollment. Although accreditation could eventually lead to the limiting of the number of programs in leisure services a recent study showed this not to be a perceived effect of the accreditation process. It is much more probably that

as a result of certification and registration the justification for limited and selective enrollment will become stronger. This will have to be closely linked with the accreditation process.

If leisure service programs are going to pursue a selective admissions program it must be based upon academic resources, the available market for graduates, and a realization that there are many other programs without limited enrollment or even in the leisure services field of study who will be competing for available positions.

SUMMARY

In summary a variety of considerations must be taken into the student selection process. While there are some curricula who are implementing selective admissions procedures, the vast majority continue to pursue a policy of non-selective or pseudo-selective admissions.

Those institutions which have instituted selective admissions have done more so as a response to the lack of resources versus a response to availability of positions in the field. The benefits of the selective admissions process have been identified to include better quality students, improved faculty performance and higher motivation by all participants in the programs.

Selective admissions may be an answer to some of the pressing problems being faced by various programs. It will not, however, provide the impetus desired until such time as accreditation and professional certification have become a major force in the profession.

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